

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for forming a component for a vehicle comprising:
providing a substrate comprising a relatively rigid material;
providing a skin adjacent at least a portion of the substrate such that a cavity is formed between the substrate and the skin;
coupling at least a portion of the skin to the substrate; and
introducing a material into the cavity after securing at least a portion of the skin to the substrate;
2. wherein the skin and the material introduced into the cavity form a cushioned region for the vehicle component. The method of Claim 1, wherein the component comprises an interior panel for a vehicle.
3. The method of Claim 2, wherein the component comprises a door panel.
4. The method of Claim 2, wherein the component is formed such that the skin is provided in a region of the interior panel intended to be contacted by a passenger in a vehicle.
5. The method of Claim 1, further comprising forming the skin utilizing a slush molding process.
6. The method of Claim 1, further comprising forming the skin utilizing at least one of a vacuum forming process, an injection molding process, an extrusion process, and a casting process.
7. The method of Claim 1, wherein the skin is formed of a material selected from the group consisting of textiles, polyurethane, polyvinylchloride, a thermoplastic olefin, and combinations thereof.
8. The method of Claim 1, wherein the material introduced into the cavity is a polymeric material.
9. The method of Claim 8, wherein the material introduced into the cavity is a foam material.

10. The method of Claim 9, wherein the step of introducing the material into the cavity comprises introducing the material into the cavity and expanding the material.

11. The method of Claim 9, wherein the foam material is introduced into the cavity through an aperture formed in the substrate.

12. The method of Claim 1, wherein the substrate comprises a material selected from the group consisting of a metal, a metal alloy, and a polymer.

13. The method of Claim 1, further comprising forming a bond between the material introduced into the cavity and at least one of the substrate and the skin.

14. The method of Claim 1, wherein the step of coupling the skin to the substrate comprises securing the skin to the substrate with a vacuum device.

15. The method of Claim 14, wherein the substrate includes at least one aperture and air within the cavity is drawn through the aperture by the vacuum device.

16. The method of Claim 1, wherein the skin includes a first feature configured for coupling with a second feature provided on the substrate, and wherein the step of coupling the skin to the substrate comprises coupling the first feature to the second feature.

17. The method of Claim 16, wherein the step of coupling the skin to the substrate further comprises utilizing a vacuum device to couple the skin to the substrate.

18. The method of Claim 17, wherein the substrate includes an aperture provided therethrough and the step of utilizing a vacuum comprises drawing air through the aperture to secure the skin to the substrate.

19. The method of Claim 18, wherein the aperture is provided in the substrate at the location where the first feature is coupled to the second feature.

20. The method of Claim 18, wherein the component includes an exterior surface having a boundary formed between the skin and the substrate, and wherein the aperture is provided in the substrate at a location intermediate the location of the boundary and the location where the first feature is coupled to the second feature.

21. The method of Claim 18, wherein the component includes an exterior surface having a boundary formed between the skin and the substrate, and wherein the location where the first feature is coupled to the second feature is provided intermediate the location of the boundary and the location of the aperture.

22. A method for forming a panel for a passenger compartment of a vehicle, the panel having localized regions of cushioning, the method comprising:

providing a relatively rigid substrate;

providing a relatively flexible material over a portion of the substrate,
wherein a cavity is formed between the substrate and the relatively flexible material;

coupling at least a portion of the relatively flexible material to the substrate;

and

introducing a foam material to the cavity after coupling at least a portion of the relatively flexible material to the substrate;

wherein the relatively flexible material and the foam material form a cushioned area in the panel.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the step of coupling at least a portion of the relatively flexible material to the substrate comprises utilizing a vacuum to couple the relatively flexible material to the substrate.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the step of coupling at least a portion of the relatively flexible material to the substrate further comprises coupling a first feature provided as part of the substrate to a second feature provided as part of the relatively flexible material.

25. The method of Claim 24, wherein the step of coupling the relatively flexible material to the substrate further comprises utilizing a vacuum device to couple the relatively flexible material to the substrate.

26. The method of Claim 25, wherein the substrate includes an aperture provided therethrough and the step of utilizing a vacuum comprises drawing air through the aperture to secure the relatively flexible material to the substrate.

27. The method of Claim 26, wherein the aperture is provided in the substrate at the location where the first feature is coupled to the second feature.

28. The method of Claim 26, wherein the panel includes an exterior surface having an interface formed between the relatively flexible material and the substrate, and wherein the aperture is provided in the substrate at a location intermediate the location of the interface and the location where the first feature is coupled to the second feature.

29. The method of Claim 26, wherein the panel includes an exterior surface having an interface formed between the relatively flexible material and the substrate, and wherein the location where the first feature is coupled to the second feature is provided intermediate the location of the interface and the location of the aperture.

30. The method of Claim 22, further comprising forming the relatively flexible material in at least one of a slush molding process, a vacuum forming process, an injection molding process, an extrusion process, and a casting process.

31. The method of Claim 22, wherein the relatively flexible material is selected from the group consisting of textiles, polyurethane, polyvinylchloride, a thermoplastic olefin, and combinations thereof.

32. The method of Claim 22, wherein the step of introducing the foam material into the cavity comprises introducing the foam material into the cavity and expanding the foam material.

33. The method of Claim 22, further comprising forming a bond between the foam material and at least one of the substrate and the relatively flexible material.